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## MILITARY TACTICS IN THE *POEM OF THE CID*

The *Poem of the Cid* (ca. 1140) is not only the Spanish epic and the first literary production of merit in the Castilian language, it is also a valuable historical document. Señor de Hinojosa, in his study *El derecho en el poema del Cid* (Madrid, 1898), has shown that the poem is accurate in its description of the institutions and customs of the twelfth century. The present notes are intended to call attention to the elements of military tactics and strategy to be found in the poem.

It should be kept in mind that it is not the main purpose of the poem to give the details of the battles described; nor should one expect to find in the Spain of that day a well-developed system of tactics and strategy. One should expect to find mere hints as to the nature of the formations and the plans of battle. These hints we shall try to interpret in the light of what is known of tactics in the thirteenth century,<sup>1</sup> and thus try to show that in the Spanish epic are to be found some of the elements of what later came to be a recognized system of military tactics and strategy.

1. The first battle of the poem is the surprise attack on Castejón (ll. 437-92).<sup>2</sup> After a council of war<sup>3</sup> in which the attack is planned, the Cid sends two hundred men to forage the country and divert attention from the attack on the town, while he lies in ambush<sup>4</sup> with the rest of his forces. The ruse succeeds. The Moors leave only a few in the town and the Cid rushes the gates.

2. The next battle is the siege of Alcocer by the Cid (550-610). The Cid took up a position on a hill near the town, and near a stream

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Henri Delpach, *La Tactique au XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris, 1886, two vols.

<sup>2</sup> The references are to the *Cantar de mio Cid*, ed. R. Menéndez Pidal, Vols. II and III, Madrid, 1911.

<sup>3</sup> In addition to the above, there are councils of war: by the Moors, 580-86; by the Cid and his men, 667-78; 985-99; 1115-33; 1685-98; 2355-67. The Cid consistently planned his battles before beginning them, an all-important precaution. Cf. Delpach, II, 2.

<sup>4</sup> *Celada* ambush, mentioned in the *Cantar* (cf. II, 571), also occurs frequently in the *Primera Crónica General* (cf. Pidal's edition, 65, a 5; 333, a 13; 364, b 21-30; 373, a 27-28; 438, a 29; 597, b 30, etc.).

so that he could not be deprived of water. He dug a trench around his position so that he could more easily defend it and waited for the town to capitulate. After fifteen weeks he decided on a ruse to capture the place as it was too strong to be taken by a frontal attack. He pretended that he gave up the siege, broke camp and rode away, taking care that all his men were well armed. When the Moors saw him apparently retreating, they came out, whereupon the Cid's men appeared to flee in confusion. The Moors then began the pursuit. After a few moments the Cid wheeled his forces and taking with him another knight, also well mounted doubtless, made for the gate, which they held until the main force came up.

3. The Moorish kings, angered by the capture of Alcocer, besieged Cid in the town (636-793). They brought a great force before the walls and cut off the Cid's water supply. Outposts in armor watched day and night for a sortie. At the end of three weeks the Cid called a council of war and a battle was determined upon as a last resort, although they were only six hundred against about three thousand (665-68). All the Moorish inhabitants were expelled, so that they might not give warning, and the Cid prepared for battle on the next morning. When he rode out the Moorish outposts fell back and warned the main body, who hastily armed and fell in line of battle. Then they advanced to the attack. The Cid planned to await their attack, but his standard-bearer charged alone into the oncoming Moors, and the Cid ordered his élite knights to charge.

Enbraçan los escudos delante los coraçones,  
abaxan las lanças abueltas de los pendones,  
enclinaron las caras de suso de los arzones,  
ívanlos ferir de fuertes coraçones [715-18].

Todos fieren en el az do está Per Vermudoz.  
Trezientas lanças son, todas tienen pendones;  
seños moros mataron, todos de seños colpes;  
a la tornada que fazen otros tantos muertos son [722-25].

This *tornada* is what M. Delpech calls a *charge à revers*, that is, a charge through the line, turn, and charge again. The first example he cites is that of the battle of Bouvines, 1214 (I, 456-59).

After being charged once more, the Moors were routed and many were killed in the pursuit. The Spanish lost but fifteen (797-98). Foot-soldiers were present at this battle (cf. 848), but we do not know how they were used, nor for that matter are we told anywhere in the poem what part the unmounted soldier played in battle, or how he was armed (cf. *Cantar*, II, 793). This battle was won by the *charge à revers*.

4. The details of this battle are meager, but it was won by a charge of the Cid's knights into the oncoming knights of Ramon Berenguel, Count of Barcelona, just as the latter descended a hill on to the plain (960-1010).

5. This battle was fought against the Moors of Valencia (1098-1155). After a council of war, the Cid attacked in front with the main body of his forces, while a subaltern with one hundred men attacked the enemy's rear at the opportune moment and won the battle. This seems to be an example of the *ordre perpendiculaire* (cf. Delpech, II, 35-64), in which the rear of the attacking force may be detached from the main body and be sent to operate on the flank or rear of the enemy.

6. The Moors were attacking Valencia (1679-1735). The Cid used the same tactics as in the preceding battle, with exactly the same results.

7. The final battle describes the attack of the Moors on Valencia once more (2355-2428). The same tactics as in (5) and (6) were employed, and the Moors were again defeated.

The more important points that may be noted in these battles are: That in all the battles except (3) and (4) the element of surprise in some form is present. Surprise, if it can be achieved, is of course an important factor in battle; that this fact was recognized by the Spaniards of the time of the Cid is clear. That one of the well-recognized tactics of the thirteenth century, the *charge à revers*, is found in battle (3). The Cid was anticipating a practice which later became well known. That the Cid may have used the *ordre perpendiculaire*; see battles (5), (6), and (7). That the Cid held councils of war before battle, that is, the plan of campaign was discussed and determined, and not left to chance on the battlefield.

That the Cid studied the *terrain* over which he expected to fight. He strove to take advantage of the *terrain* if possible, and only fought under disadvantageous conditions when he was obliged to do so. That he depended on cavalry, in the main. He had infantry, but, apparently, it was not as well developed or as well armed as it was in the thirteenth century.<sup>1</sup> That a system of foraging was developing or had been developed at the time of the writing of the poem.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Delpech, I, 269-393. The same author (I, 89, 122) notes that the infantry was placed before the cavalry. The same tactics were used in Spain in the thirteenth century. See the *Poema de Fernán González*, ed. C. C. Marden, 458, c-d.

<sup>2</sup> Sr. Menéndez Pidal has brought together (*Cantar*, II, 454-55) citations to show that these raids were of common occurrence later (thirteenth century).